SCOPING PROPOSAL IN DETAIL
STARRIGAVAN WATERSHED AND RECREATION ENHANCEMENT
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
SITKA RANGER DISTRICT

PROPOSED ACTION

The Sitka Ranger District proposes restoration and enhancement actions which can be roughly divided into watershed (W) and recreation (R) categories. Generally, large equipment will be used to:

1. Reconstruct 1,000 feet of stream channel and floodplain to concentrate flows to a stable single thread channel (W)
2. Reconstruct 2,000 feet of OHV trail to reduce erosion including installation of 3 fish culverts (72", 48", 48") that were damaged in landslide (W). Resurface 2,000 feet of OHV trail impacted (R).
3. Construct 2 new ponds for off channel coho rearing habitat (W).
4. Reconstruct 2 existing ponds impacted by landslide/floods (W).
5. Maintain 500 feet of OHV trail to reduce erosion (including installation of waterbars on sloped trails to prevent surface erosion) (W).
6. Remove 15 failing culverts and replace with hardened drivable fords (W).
7. Install 4 debris jams using native material (logs/stumps) on East Fork Starrigavan Creek to reduce bank erosion (W).
8. Reuse a stockpiled Nelson Logging Road bridge to replace failing log stringer bridge over Starrigavan Class I fish stream with old, stockpiled Nelson Logging Road bridge (W).
9. Reuse a stockpiled Nelson Logging Road bridge to create a crossing across new mainstem Starrigavan Creek (R).
10. Install a gate or other restriction device at current entrance to existing parking lot to separate traffic and create an OHV learning/practice area and expand this existing OHV by approximately 7,000 sq. feet to the west (R).
11. Create a new parking lot (appx. 14,000 sq. ft.) by expanding the existing pull out area (waterfall rock pit) along Nelson Logging Road using heavy equipment (R).
12. Create an approximately 500-foot long bypass trail (separated from the Nelson Logging Road) from new parking lot to existing OHV parking lot and learning/practice area (R).
13. Create a loading/unloading area between the new parking lot and the learning/practice area. This approximately 4,000 sq. ft. area will be for temporary parking only and include an earthen berm/ramp to aid loading/unloading without need for a portable ramp (R).
14. Add one or more constructed features (e.g. berm, obstacle) to OHV learning/practice area (R).
15. Construct two new short OHV trails (appx. 0.6 and 0.7 miles) that would create additional loop opportunities with the existing OHV trail system (see Loops 1 and 2). Trails would be open to OHV's 50 inches or less in width and non-motorized users (R).

16. Extend existing South Fork Starrigavan Creek OHV trail approximately 1/3 mile. Trails would be open to OHV's 50 inches or less in width and non-motorized users (R).
17. Construct new single-track trail (appx. 2.5 miles) that would provide a loop opportunity with the South Fork Starrigavan Creek OHV trail (see Loop 3). This trail would be open to motorized bikes and motorcycles and to non-motorized users (R).
18. Reconstruct 300' of OHV trail around margin of landslide debris flow at head of valley to access Eagle Dip Lake Trail (R).
19. Construct new Starrigavan Ridge Loop Trail (New Hiking Trail 1, appx. 4.8 miles). This trail would be open to foot traffic. (R)
20. Construct/improve Eagle Dip Lake Trail (New Hiking Trail 2, appx. 1.7 miles) in the same general vicinity as the existing user created trail but located for resource protection and maintenance considerations. This trail would be open to foot traffic (R).
21. Construct an approximately 2.5-mile hiking trail (New Hiking Trail 3) from the South Fork Starrigavan Creek to Harbor Mountain/Gavan Hill trail. The proposed route would tie into the Harbor Mountain/Gavan Hill trail near the existing shelter. This trail would be open to foot traffic. (R)
22. Create new single-track mountain bike trail/s (narrow, 1-2' wide) within existing OHV trail loops. This/these trails would be open to non-motorized users
23. If the opportunity to cooperate with the State becomes available, develop parking for vehicles (mainly those with OHV and snowmobile trailers) at the north end of Halibut Point Road (where Katlian Road would begin).

Old growth trees would only be cut for new trail construction. Tree cutting would be minimal and only for trail clearing where avoidance isn't viable, and for construction of bridges to cross small stream channels or create steps and additional trail structures. Pit run and locally sourced gravel will be used. A helicopter would be used to sling materials to the trails. Hand tools and chainsaws would be used to clear and grub trails and trailhead signs would be installed at trailheads. Small tracked equipment (e.g. excavator, hauler) may be used during construction. The length and size of developments is a best estimate given current knowledge; final length and size of proposed developments may change dependent on route, location, and terrain challenges.

Location

The project area includes the entire Starrigavan Watershed but focuses mainly on recreational and watershed opportunities accessible from the Sitka road system.

Need for the Proposed Action

In the Starrigavan watershed, there is a need for:

- High functioning watershed and fisheries
- Motorized and non-motorized hunting and recreation opportunities that are accessible from the road system
- Safe, affordable, and sustainable recreational opportunities, emphasizing locally popular recreation places

The purpose of this project is to restore and enhance aquatic and recreational resources impacted by previous extreme weather events, as well as, provide additional recreational opportunities to forest users accessible from the Sitka road system.

In 2014, a large rainfall event triggered landslides in the Starrigavan watershed. The largest of these landslides in the mainstem portion of the valley, along with its runout zone, destroyed/impacted approximately 2,000 feet of anadromous stream channel, riparian forests and three floodplain coho rearing ponds. The terminus of debris flow knocked a bridge off its foundation and subsequently diverted streamflow out of its original channel and onto downstream trails and existing tributary channels. This diverted streamflow essentially turned approximately 1,000 feet of road into a new stream channel, causing additional erosion, degraded aquatic habitat, as well as destroying three fish culverts, a coho rearing pond and blocking all use of approximately 0.75 miles of the trail system in the upper watershed.

Motorized recreational opportunities (Off Highway Vehicles-OHV riding) areas accessible from the Sitka road system are extremely limited, with the Starrigavan Valley Trails being the only year-round use areas. With the impacts from the landslide, almost a quarter of the trail system has been eliminated or blocked off. Additionally, the current vehicle parking area at the trailhead, while sizeable, is not large enough to serve as a training area for new and young riders and can pose a safety risk with mixed on-road and off-road vehicle use. An old rock pit pull out to the west of this area could be expanded to serve as a dedicated parking area.

Two user made trails that access sub-alpine and alpine locations exist within the watershed. The Starrigavan Ridge Trail starts at the small rock pit along the Nelson Logging Road and goes straight up the hillside to the treeline. The trail is steep, muddy and has numerous locations of excessive erosion from use and water running down the trail. The second trail starts at the end of the road system at the head of the mainstem valley and accesses Eagle Dip Lake. This lesser used trail traverses both young growth and old growth stands, with the headwater channel of Starrigavan creek bisecting the two before reaching the alpine. Within the young growth, the trail is uneven and brushy, while the old growth section is ill-defined and has a section that is fairly steep where users have created multiple routes up and down. There is no bridge for crossing the upper Starrigavan stream channel which can be challenging during elevated stream flows.

TIME AND DURATION OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The Proposed Action has multiple components that will be implemented as funding and other opportunities allow. Funding is currently available for stream restoration survey and design; funding is likely to be available for reconstruction of the existing OHV trail system in 2021. Our hope is to begin watershed and trail restoration work, as well as work on the parking lots starting in the spring of 2021 with completion as early as fall of 2021.

Trail and recreation components would require seeking funding sources and potentially partners and volunteers. We would likely implement recreation work in phases and attempt to fund and implement a mix of trail types (i.e., a mix of hiking, biking, and motorized trail) in each phase. It is likely that it will take multiple years to fund, design, and implement all phases of this proposed action.

Instream activities would occur during timing windows developed in consultation with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADFG), Title 16 Memorandum of Understanding. The Forest Service would also obtain the required U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permits as required.

Figure 1. Starrigavan Watershed and Recreation Enhancement Project Area Map (also available at: https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57497)